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To cite this article: Ralf Havertz (2018): Right-Wing Populism and Neoliberalism in Germany: The AfD's Embrace of Ordoliberalism, New Political Economy, DOI: [10.1080/13563467.2018.1484715](https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2018.1484715)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2018.1484715>



Published online: 14 Jun 2018.



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Right-Wing Populism and Neoliberalism in Germany: The AfD's Embrace of Ordoliberalism

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the ambiguous relation between right-wing populism and neoliberalism in Germany. It concentrates on the connections between and convergence of right-wing populism and ordoliberalism, a specific type of neoliberalism that was developed by the *Freiburg School* since the late 1920s and which the new right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) explicitly focuses on in its economic programme. In its attempt to analyse the affinity of the AfD to ordoliberalism, this study relies on Michel Foucault's account of ordoliberalism in his book *The Birth of Biopolitics* and his concept of governmentality. It was found that the AfD wants to bring ordoliberalism into service of an authoritarian project in Germany and beyond. This economic approach combines neoliberalism with authoritarian forms of government through the governmentalisation of the state. Ordoliberals prescribe a regulatory framework for the economy which is centred on the creation of a competitive order. It is meant to produce and justify social differences. Right-wing populists connect the economic differentiation system provided by ordoliberalism with the differentiation systems of nation, race, religion and culture. Thus, the neoliberal principle of competition is used not only to justify inequality among German citizens but also among European countries.

KEYWORDS

Alternative for Germany (AfD); right-wing populism; neoliberalism; ordoliberalism; authoritarian liberalism

Introduction

Neoliberalism has become the hegemonic ideology. Most states have embraced some version of neo-liberal thought and implemented some form of neoliberal policies (Harvey 2005, p. 3). Neoliberalism inserts its market-centred rationality into all aspects of life and thus informs governmental reason, the organisation of society and the configuration of subjectivity. It 'produces everyday norms of identity and conduct that configure the subject as human capital' (Brown 2016, p. 5). In doing so, it has become the 'shared mental model' for the majority of the people who live on this planet (Roy, Denzau, and Willett 2007, p. 5). And yet amid this triumph of neoliberalism, rage and resentment against the established order are on the rise. In many countries, this fundamental opposition takes the form of populism. In the case of Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), a right-wing populist party, is tapping into these energies of discontent not to resist the neoliberal order but to strengthen it. As the analysis of this party and its relation to *ordoliberalism*, a specific type of neoliberalism, will show, this party set out to intensify the way neoliberalism takes effect in the post-democratic society of Germany. While an authoritarian tendency – which may not look authoritarian on the surface – has all along been inherent in neoliberalism (Bruff 2012, p. 114; Candeias, Oberndorfer, and Steckner

2014), the implementation of ordoliberalism as conceived by the right-wing populists of the AfD would mark an *authoritarian turn of neoliberalism*.

The puzzle of the AfD is that they – despite their anti-establishment posture – do not want to break with the neoliberal agenda of the incumbent government; actually, they want to radicalise it. This is quite surprising since one would expect that a right-wing radical party intends to set up a government that takes control of the economy by restricting and intervening with economic activity, and that it prefers a strong over a weak state. The AfD does not disappoint here, though in an unexpected manner: It hopes to establish a strong state that intervenes less. At the first glance, this may seem paradoxical. But a closer inspection of the relation between right-wing populism and ordoliberalism in Germany will show that it makes perfect sense: The AfD hopes to establish a strong state by expanding government beyond its institutionalised form into society and by enlisting everybody in the governmental pursuit of economic growth. Ordoliberalism is the ideal vehicle for a right-wing radical party like the AfD to bring out the already present authoritarian character of neoliberalism even stronger, without openly resorting to authoritarianism.

While many of the social-conservative and national-liberal positions of the party are obviously opposed to liberal democracy, their economic programme explicitly espouses neoliberal principles such as competition and the price mechanism as regulatory institutions of the market process. The party's proposals include a market-radical transformation of the German society with less government intervention in the market, the slimming down of the social welfare state, a reduction of the burdens for those who are perceived as achievers and an increased responsibility of individuals for their own well-being and for the risks of life (Salzborn 2016, p. 53). The changes claimed by the AfD would step up the pressure on individuals to form their subjectivity according to the demands of the market.

The programme of the party deviates from ordinary neoliberalism where it asserts the need for a *regulatory framework* of the economy, the centrepiece of which would be a *competitive order*. This claim is based on the *ordoliberal* approach of the *Freiburg School* the main thinkers of which – Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, Alexander Rüstow, Franz Böhm and Alfred Müller-Armack – began to develop their economic concepts and theories at the end of the 1920s/beginning of the 1930s. The ordoliberals thought that if the forces of the market were left to play out unregulated, they would result in the concentration of private power in monopolies and oligopolies that could be used to undermine competition and distort the price mechanism. In the ordoliberal conception, a competitive order is supposed to prevent competition from turning against itself.

In practice, ordoliberalism would not only focus on the ways how government could make a free market function by imposing a framework order, it would also have a social and an ethical dimension. For Eucken (2004, p. 368), to make the framework order work, it was indispensable to *prepare society* for the ordoliberal version of the free market through economic education and the spread of an ethics conducive to the functioning of the market. Michel Foucault (2004) in his book *The Birth of Biopolitics* went so far as to say that ordoliberalism would upend the way government works, as opposed to the way the workings of government are commonly understood. He referred to it as a 'new programming of liberal governmentality' that was specific for post-war Germany as it was not the German state that regulated and controlled the economy, it was the economy that had a state-creating and state-legitimising function (Foucault 2004, p. 94–5). For Foucault's analysis of *governmentality*, ordoliberalism was an ideal study object, because it allowed to demonstrate how government may co-opt actors outside of the institutional framework of government and in different spheres of society (corporations, non-governmental organisations, individuals) and involve them in its governmental rationality. The adoption and internalisation of that rationality would turn them into an active element of government, effectively blurring the boundaries between supposedly clearly delineated entities such as government, economy, society and the individual. According to Foucault (1991, p. 103), governmentality is 'at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not'.

The AfD pursues an authoritarian project at the core of which is the attempt to ensure social inequality as an organisational principle of society (Decker and Brähler 2016). It is authoritarian because it recognises neither the legitimacy of any opposition to its positions nor any interests outside of what it claims to be the interests of ‘the people’. If they come to power, this would inevitably result in the suppression of opposition. The central concept of the AfD’s populist ideology is ‘the people’, whose sovereignty is conceived as the foundation for the power of the populists. Their populism is in accordance with Mudde and Kaltwasser’s (2012, 2013, 2017) definition of populism: It is characterised by its anti-establishment rhetoric and the idea of the ‘pure people’ who are betrayed by the ruling elite and by others, outsiders that are in cahoots with the elite. The AfD poses as the only legitimate representative of ‘the people’. They claim the ability of the people to form a unified will and that it is them, the AfD, who represent this will exclusively. Any opposition to it is depicted as illegitimate and treasonous.

In the literature, little attention has been paid to the economic policy of right-wing populist parties, because right-wing populists are usually ‘not seen as offering a substantial program on social and economic affairs’ (Lochocki 2015, p. 3). There are only a few international studies that examined populist approaches to the economy, and they have usually focused on left-wing populist parties (EEAG 2017, p. 53). But right-wing populist economic theory and economic policy clearly is an understudied area. Regarding right-wing populism in Germany, there are only few scholars who covered this topic more extensively, especially Bebnowski (2013, 2015, 2016), Bebnowski and Förster (2014), and Plehwe (2016, 2014). The intricate relationship between right-wing populism and liberalism is one of the main issues investigated by these authors. Of special interest for this study is Bebnowski’s concept of *competitive populism*, which brings light into the role which the neo-liberal principle of competition plays for the right-wing populists in the attempt to deepen inequality within the German society and foster a hierarchical relationship among European countries.

Before we can proceed with the analysis of the relationship between right-wing populism and ordoliberalism in Germany, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of right-wing populism, which will be done in the first section of this article. In the second section, this study will characterise the AfD, the most important right-wing populist party of Germany. The third section concentrates on the analysis of the role which ordoliberalism and national liberalism play in the ideology of the AfD and how ordoliberalism is integrated in its attempt to create an authoritarian system of differences. In the fourth section, this article will examine how ordoliberalism may contribute to the reconfiguration of the state toward authoritarianism. Finally, the concept of competitive populism will be analysed.

What Is Right-Wing Populism?¹

There are many different approaches to populism that interpret the phenomenon differently, among others, as ‘an ideology, a movement, or a syndrome’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, p. 2). This study primarily relies on Mudde and Kaltwasser’s *ideational approach* that conceives populism either as ‘a discourse, an ideology, or a worldview’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, p. 5).

The rise of populism is the consequence of changes in the modern society where the integrating power of political parties and institutions such as labour unions has weakened and the trust in political parties and the electoral process decreased. Scholars described this phenomenon as *crisis of representation*. Catch-all political parties, especially social-democratic parties, are in decline in many countries. They have lost contact to their party base and to the wider populace. At the same time, the political programmes of these parties have become more and more indistinguishable, since none of them is challenging the neoliberal order that has become the norm throughout Europe. In this context, Kriesi (2014, p. 361) talked about ‘the increasing erosion of the representative function of European party systems’.

In many European countries, including Germany, populism is the result of a social polarisation that does not find its equivalence in the party system. There are almost no political parties that clearly

represent the interests of workers, the middle class or the bourgeoisie. In Germany, many parties have been drifting towards what is perceived as the 'centre' (Hirscher 2013, p. 36), and have become indistinguishable. According to Ernesto Laclau, this crisis of representation occurred because the institutional system has increasingly lost the ability to respond differentially to social demands. This shortcoming of the system 'leads to an internal chasm within society and the construction of two antagonistic chains of equivalences' (Laclau 2005, p. 46). Populism inserts itself where the polarisation of society is not reflected in programmes and actions of established political parties and exploits the discontent and confused identities of those who are (or fear to be) negatively affected by those divisions. In their programmes and in their rhetoric, the populists do not reflect on the actual antagonisms of society. They divert attention from the real problems by claiming the existence of another division: Populist ideology separates society 'into two homogenous and antagonistic groups – "the pure people" versus the "corrupt elite", and argues that politics should be an expression of the "volonté Générale" (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004, p. 543). The community of the 'pure people' is imagined as 'homogenous and virtuous', while the 'corrupt elite' is also understood as homogenous, but – by contrast to the community of the pure people – as 'pathological entity' (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, p. 151). The idea that people can unify their wills to form a *general will* is aimed at 'proclaiming popular sovereignty as the only legitimate source of political power' (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, p. 151). Populists pose as representatives of 'the people' who have been betrayed by a corrupt elite. Focusing on 'the people' (as opposed to class) has the advantage that they are numerous, which implies the idea that they are in the majority and, thus, may confer greater legitimacy (Taggart 2000, p. 92).

The problem inherent in the concept of sovereignty, as described by Danzelot (1991, p. 171–2), is that it derives solely from the individual, while the general will, which the state is an embodiment of, can be understood as 'an active synthesis of individual sovereignties and power'. The establishment of a unified will requires the complete absorption of individual wills; otherwise, the individual could challenge each intervention of the state, legitimised by the sovereignty that she is still holding. On the other hand, if the state totally absorbs the individual wills as a foundation of its power, it creates a void on the side of the individual and the power of the state becomes absolute: 'There is nothing left to oppose it, and nothing to contest it' (Danzelot 1991, p. 171). These contradictions inherent in the concept of sovereignty appear to pose an insoluble problem. Though for populists, this problem does not exist. It is solved by the invocation of 'the people', which is essentially a construct. 'The people' are thought of as a communal entity of unified wills, while the individual is seen as an element of 'the people'. Hence, the individual is still present in 'the people' and represented by 'the people' (or by those who claim to represent 'the people', the populists). Since the individual is represented by and incorporated in the people, there is no need for its separate voice to be heard.

The populist distinction between the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite' involves a moralisation of politics, or in Müller's words: 'A particular moralistic imagination of politics' (Müller 2014, p. 485). The 'pure, innocent, always hard-working people' which the populists pit against the elite do not exist in the real world; they are an imaginary construct, created for political purposes (Müller 2014, p. 485). In the view of right-wing populism, the 'pure people' are not only threatened by the elite but also by 'others' who deprive the 'the people' of their 'rights, values, property, identity and voice' (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015, p. 5). In the right-wing populist imaginary, the elite colludes with others – unproductive minorities or immigrants – to pursue their own interests at the expense of 'the people'. In this worldview, elites work only for themselves or 'for essentially undeserving minorities who do not really belong to the demos' (Müller 2014, p. 485–6). The distinction of right-wing populism between 'us', the 'pure people', and 'them', those who are to be excluded from the construct of 'the people' on social, ethnical, racial, cultural or religious grounds, is convenient, because it provides those who are affected by the manifold disruptive effects of the neoliberal order with a potential scapegoat for their misery or their fear of social downward mobility. Right-wing populism often is combined with ideologies that are centred on *identity*. Based on *identarian conceptions*, right-wing populism constructs a hierarchy among citizens and differentiates between those who are part of the 'pure people' and

those who are not. It has a simplistic understanding of democracy; at its centre is a form of 'crude majoritarianism that neglects or overrides the rights of minorities' (Conovan 1999, p. 7).

The Right-Wing Populist Party AfD

When the AfD was founded in February 2013, the party was perceived as a one-issue party that was mainly focusing on Eurosceptic positions. The party criticised the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) of the EU and the handling of the euro crisis by European leaders (Berbair, Lewandowsky, and Siri, 2015). One of its main positions was giving up the common European currency, the euro, and replacing it with the German mark. Right from the beginning, the party gained a reputation for its supposed economic expertise. Many economists were among the founders of the party, some of whom had formerly fought legal battles against German membership in the eurozone (Bebnowski 2015, pp. 22–3). Bernd Lucke, chairman of the AfD and the party's most prominent face until his resignation in July 2015, is an economist at the University of Hamburg. Joachim Starbatty, another founding member of the party and until his departure in July 2015 representing the party as a member of the European Parliament, was an economics professor in Tübingen. Hans-Olaf Henkel, who joined the party about a year after its foundation, is an economics professor too and well-known to the German public as the former president of the Federation of German Industries (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie), because of his many appearances on television as a discussant in talk shows and as an interview partner. In its first years, the party was often referred to as 'party of economists' (Bebnowski 2015, p. 19) or 'party of professors' (Grimm 2015, pp. 270–1).

Among the party leaders, there were many who in the past were members of centre-right parties such as the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Angela Merkel's party, or the economic liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP). Former party chairman Lucke and Alexander Gauland, since December 2017 one of the two chairpersons of the party and an important representative of its national-conservative wing, were members of the CDU before they founded the AfD; Henkel was a member of the FDP before he joined the party in 2014. They were disappointed about the shift of the CDU toward the centre on sociocultural matters and were disappointed in the FDP for its lack of Euroscepticism (Decker 2016, p. 3).

The 2013 national election was the first election in which the party participated. In this election, the party missed the 5-per cent threshold for parliamentary representation by a narrow margin of 0.3 per cent. Since then, the AfD succeeded in getting over the 5-per cent hurdle in all subsequent elections on the regional and European level. In some regional elections that were held in 2016, the AfD gained votes in double-digit percentage numbers: Baden-Württemberg: 15.1; Rhineland-Palatinate: 12.6; Saxony-Anhalt: 24.3; Mecklenburg-Pommern: 20.8; Berlin: 14.2 (Havertz 2016). Key to the early success of the party was the quick increase of its membership and its ability to establish party sections throughout the country in all 16 German states within only a few months after its foundation (Korte 2013).

In 2017, the AfD lost voter support in regional elections,² which can be attributed to a considerable reduction in the number of immigrants who came to Germany since summer 2016. With the reduced influx of migrants, the party lost appeal among voters who viewed immigration as the most salient political issue during the refugee crisis of 2015–16. Despite its weak performance in recent regional elections, the AfD did rather well in the federal election on 24 September 2017, where the party gained 12.6 per cent of the votes (94 of the 709 seats)³ (Federal Returning Officer 2017).

A comparison between the election results in East and West Germany shows that the AfD performed stronger in the east than in the west. But it is important to note that it is by no means a regional phenomenon confined to East Germany. The party also has a high potential in the west of Germany (Havertz 2016). A major reason for the difference between east and west is that the support for an authoritarian system is much higher among the citizens of East Germany than among citizens of West Germany. A study by the University of Leipzig found that 4.8 per cent of the respondents in the west said under certain conditions a dictatorship would be preferable to a

democratic system, while 13.8 per cent of the respondents in East Germany agreed on that statement. The support for the rule of an authoritarian leader (10 per cent in the west, 12.8 per cent in the east) and the formation of a homogenous 'people's community' (21 per cent in the west, 25.5 per cent in the east) was also higher in the east than in the west (Decker et al. 2016b, pp. 31–2). The same study found that 52.2 per cent of AfD voters are generally holding right-wing extremist worldviews (Decker et al. 2016a, p. 78). They are significantly more chauvinist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, social-Darwinist and more prone to relativise the National Socialist regime than the voters of all other major parties (Decker et al. 2016a.).

The ideological placement of the AfD has been a contentious issue among scholars, due to the many ideological strands that are combined in the thinking of the party: economic liberalism, national-conservatism and right-wing populism (Häusler and Roeser 2015, pp. 13–27, Decker 2016, p. 5). The question is especially how national-conservatism and right-wing populism, on one side, fit together with economic liberalism, on the other side. At the centre of the national-conservatism of the party is the commitment to principles of traditional order and virtues that are understood as being specifically German (Häusler and Roeser 2015, p. 19–20). The party has an anti-immigrant agenda and many of its statements are xenophobic. These positions spring from the opposition to societal pluralism and the protection of minority rights (Häusler 2016, p. 169–70). The core ideology of the party is volkish-nationalism, a specific type of ethnic nationalism. Central to this nationalism is the concept of 'the people', thought of as a homogenous entity. Volkish-nationalism had already gained prominence during the National Socialist period of Germany where the Nazi regime pursued the goal of establishing a racially pure ethnic community, the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community). This community was not just conceived as a social one but also as a physical one, a community of bodies, as 'people's body' (*Volkskörper*), a unified racial corpus that was 'authoritarian, hierarchically structured, and racially homogeneous' (Lemke 2011, p. 11). In 2016, Frauke Petry, then chairperson of the AfD, suggested that the term volkish should again be seen in a more positive light (Biermann 2016). The commonalities and overlaps of volkish-nationalism and right-wing populism are obvious when looking at their conceptions of 'the people'. Revisionist positions which claim that Germany has for too long and too strongly focused on its guilt because of the atrocities of the Second World War and the Holocaust are ubiquitous in the statements and writings of AfD representatives of all party wings.⁴ The electoral programme of the party states that it would be an important task for the cultural policy of Germany to break up a memorial culture that is too narrowly focused on National Socialism and to broaden the understanding of history so as to include more positive elements (AfD 2017). The combination of volkish-nationalism and historical revisionism with right-wing populism clearly indicates that the AfD can be placed to the far-right of the political spectrum.

The AfD and Ordoliberalism

In the early years of the AfD, the economic liberal wing dominated the party. During that period, party leaders like Lucke, Henkel and Starbatty actively promoted an ordoliberal system for Germany. To date, their ideas had a lasting effect on the programme and on positions of the party. These market-radical economists cultivated an image of economic expertise for the party which it used successfully in its campaigns. After these economists and other economic liberals left the AfD, the party made some effort to keep the voters who were attracted by its purported economic competence. This is reflected in decisions on the leadership of the party: At the party convention in July 2015, the AfD elected two chairpersons – Petry, who represented the national-conservative and right-wing populist faction, and Jörg Meuthen, another economics professor, who was assumed to be appealing to the market-radical supporters of the AfD. Meuthen is still one of the two chairpersons of the party. The AfD adopted a similar strategy when they chose the leading two candidates for the national election in 2017: Gauland ran as a top candidate to appeal to voters with a national-conservative or right-wing populist worldview; Alice Weidel, who worked as a business consultant, ran as the

second top candidate to attract economic liberal voters. After the federal election in September 2017, Gauland and Weidel were made floor leaders of the party in the Bundestag.

Even though many economic liberals who favoured ordoliberalism left the AfD in 2015, it has not abandoned its commitment to ordoliberalism, as more recent statements of party leaders clearly show: On the party convention of the AfD in April 2016, Meuthen declared that the party is standing on a 'classical ordoliberal fundament' (Jahn 2016). In an interview with the New Right weekly *Junge Freiheit*, he said that socio-politically he would see himself as 'enlightened-conservative' and economically as ordoliberal (Schwarz 2016). Weidel told the daily *Handelsblatt*, that ordoliberalism and Walter Eucken with his concentration on economic regulation would be the major reference points of her economic thinking⁵ (Häring 2017). Marc Jongen, the self-proclaimed party philosopher of the AfD – he worked as research associate at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG Karlsruhe) under the direction of Peter Sloterdijk before he became a member of the Bundestag in 2017 – gave an interview to Alain de Benoist, a central figure of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, who was also very influential in initiating the intellectual New Right in Germany. In that interview, Jongen associates ordoliberalism with the 'Conservative Revolution', a heterogeneous group of reactionary, mostly German and Austrian authors of the interwar period who have been described as precursors of National Socialism, and many of which had in common their sympathy for Italian fascism (Phahl-Traugher 1998, p. 105–6). The 'Conservative Revolution' is idealised by the intellectual New Right and a buzzword in conversations of national-conservatives. According to Jongen, ordoliberalism is one of the few elements of liberalism that are worth saving by a 'Conservative Revolution' (Benoist and Saint-Clare 2017, p. 35). In other words, once the AfD is in power, it will change the German society radically, but in this process, it will not discard ordoliberalism. Jongen reprimands the liberal elite for betraying the principles of ordoliberalism, indicating that his party would make use of this economic approach in strict accordance with its tenets (Benoist and Saint-Clare 2017, p. 35).

The affinity of the AfD to ordoliberalism is also reflected in the party programme of 2016. In that programme, the AfD presents itself as 'the party of social market economy' (AfD 2016, p. 21). Social market economy denotes Rhenish Capitalism, the form of capitalism that was adopted in West Germany before reunification. The term also refers to the ordoliberal idea of the market economy as prescribed by the *Freiburg School* with its main theorists Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, Alexander Rüstow, Franz Böhm and Alfred Müller-Armack and the role which state and society would play for such an economy. The works of the Freiburg School provided the blueprint for the political-economic system that was implemented in Germany after the Second World War under the guidance of the powerful minister of economics, Ludwig Erhard. However, it is noteworthy that Rhenish Capitalism was not a pure version of the market economy as outlined by the ordoliberals. Keynesianism left its mark because of the American influence in the establishment of the post-war order of Germany, and the Bismarckian social state still existed and had to be continued to some extent (Foucault 2004, p. 144). When talking about social market economy, the AfD is neither referring to Keynesian nor Bismarckian approaches to economics but to the ideas of the Freiburg School in their pure form. In fact, the party programme of 2016 explicitly mentions Eucken, Röpke and Müller-Armack as the theoretical foundation for its economic positions (AfD 2016, p. 67). In the section on economic policy, it adopts the fundamental ideas of ordoliberalism, which favour a free market economy with free entrepreneurs that are acting based on a regulatory framework established by government. It is important to note that ordoliberals are strictly opposed to any *direct* government intervention. Eucken (2012a, pp. 76–7), who is seen as the main thinker of the Freiburg School, claimed that government must be given the authority to regulate the general ways in which the economy functions, but shall not directly control the economic process itself. The role of the state is not to regulate the economy but to *organise the social environment* of the economy to make sure it is conducive to economic activities (Foucault 2004, p. 146; Eucken 2004, pp. 180–1).

Ordoliberalism was proposed as a *third way* between laissez-faire liberalism and socialism (Pies 2011, p. 231; Young 2013, p. 39). It reserves a role for government in the economy. The government is expected to spell out the general conditions for economic activity. But the role of government is by

far smaller in an ordoliberal system than in a system based on economic planning. In fact, ordoliberalism and neoliberalism have much in common. Both share a supply orientation and assume that aggregate supply will always be met by the respective amount of demand (Maczynska and Pysz 2014, p. 37). For both, competition and the price mechanism are the essential organising principles of the market (Foucault 2004, p. 118; Crouch 2011, p. 17).

The regulatory framework prescribed by ordoliberals especially focuses on the facilitation of free competition which is seen as indispensable for the smooth functioning of the market. The centre-piece of that framework is rules which are supposed to prevent the principle of competition from turning against itself by the creation of monopolies and oligopolies that undermine competition (Young 2013, p. 40). The rules of this framework are also supposed to make any rent-seeking behaviour impossible, because the order established in this framework is deemed to be 'privilege-free, non-discriminating' (Vanberg 2013, p. 27). Eucken (1949, p. 31) compared the regulatory framework that he envisioned for the economy to the constitution of a state. Like a political constitution that prescribes the separation of powers for the branches of government and the competences (and limitations thereof) of the main government institutions, the framework would stipulate the competences for the different actors involved in market activities. Hence, the framework order can be understood as an *economic constitution* (Vanberg 2013, p. 25). At its core, the regulatory framework as envisioned by Eucken was focused on the establishment of a *competitive order*. Ensuring that free competition is also a crucial element of the economic programme of the AfD (2016, p. 67):

The best economic results are achieved through market competition. Unsubsidised supply that offers the greatest advantage to market participants will prevail in the long-term. Therefore, this is what holds true for the AfD: The more competition and the lower the public spending ratio the better for everyone. For competition creates the freedom to grow and decide individually whether to acquire private property in goods and means of production, to conclude contracts in one's own interest and in the interest of the public good, to choose among suppliers, products, services, and jobs, to take profitable opportunities, and to take responsibility for any possible failure.

This section of the party programme is a collection of core ideas of ordoliberalism. It includes the commitment of the AfD to provide for as much competition in the market as possible and as less government involvement in economic activity as necessary, praises competition as a premise for the free enterprising activity of individuals, rejects the subsidisation of businesses and states the party's preference for a reduced public spending ratio. It maintains that individuals who pursue their interests in the market with success will simultaneously always serve the common good with their activity. This idea of the unity of private and public interests is in keeping with Eucken's view that an economic order is capable of spawning the harmonisation of individual interests with those of the public (Eucken 2004, p. 368). The individual as an entrepreneur is at the centre of the programmatic considerations of the AfD on economic matters. She is the primary actor who will either reap the fruit of her endeavours or bear the consequences of her failures. All the ideas expressed in this paragraph of the party programme are in accordance with ordoliberalism. The programme stays its ordoliberal course where it calls for the regulation of the market to prevent monopolies and market failure (AfD 2016, p. 67).

The programme also espouses the idea of a *regulatory ethic* (Ordnungsethik) (AfD 2016, p. 67). Here, the programme is again in accordance with ordoliberalism. Eucken (2004, p. 323–4) thought that *social justice* could be achieved if market participants accept and internalise the need for a 'free order' of the market. The idea of a market order would have to be deeply ingrained in their social disposition.

The party strictly opposes the monetary policy of the *European Central Bank* (ECB), especially the measures taken by the bank in dealing with the euro crisis, involving the unlimited purchase of sovereign bonds from struggling countries – a scheme that was introduced in 2012 (Traynor 2012). It is seen as a policy that levers out the basic mechanisms of the market – which are supposed to function based on savings and investments – and, therefore, threatens the functioning of the social market economy (AfD 2016, p. 67). Price stability and a stable exchange rate of the national currency are

an issue of great importance to the AfD. This, again, is a position consistent with the ordoliberal approach. The Freiburg School viewed monetary stability as an essential precondition for a stable market economy (Eucken 2004, p. 259, 2012b, p. 63; Roepke 2017, pp. 190–1⁶). To achieve the goal of stability, they prescribed that the national bank of Germany should be an institution independent from any political influence. From the beginning in 1948, when the *Bank of German States*, the predecessor organisation of today's central bank of Germany, the *Bundesbank*, was founded, the central bank system of post-war Germany was based on the theories of the Freiburg School, especially the need for the independence of the central bank (Young 2013, p. 34). When the EMU was implemented with the introduction of the common European currency, the ECB, founded in 1998, was based on the same principles. In fact, it was modelled after the *Bundesbank* (Eijffinger and Hoerberichts 2008).

The programme of the AfD talks about countries that lack the capabilities necessary to be part of the European currency union, and it urges to end the bond-purchasing scheme of the ECB immediately. The activities of the bank are seen as illegal and a potential step toward a transfer union that would involve the redistribution of wealth from the richer to the poorer countries of the EU. The economic relations between Germany and the countries of the European south are depicted as an aberration that is burdening Germany and favouring the southern countries, while Germany has actually benefited enormously from European integration, resulting in huge balance of trade surpluses and a considerable reduction of its sovereign bond yields.

In the view of the AfD, the European currency union is a misguided political project that makes no economic sense and was implemented at the expense of Germany which has to cover the largest share of the payments and guarantees necessary to rescue the euro (AfD 2016, p. 17–9). Weidel, for instance, insinuated that the exports of German corporations to poorer countries of the EU would anyway all be financed by Germany due to the TARGET-2 clearing system of the eurozone where the amount of outstanding debt of these countries has risen (Häring 2017).⁷ Henkel even suggested that people in Greece have nothing better to do than spending hard-earned German money to put swimming pools in their gardens (Henkel 2012, p. 170), playing on the stereotype of lazy southern Europeans defrauding honest and diligent Germans. What is commonplace in the statements of AfD representatives is the misrepresentation of the economic relations between Germany and the rest of Europe, especially the countries of the South. This was true for the economic liberals of the early years and is still true for the remaining ordoliberals in the party.

Critique of the design of the eurozone and of the management of the euro crisis by EU institutions is, of course, warranted. The austerity regime that was imposed on the countries of the European south is not working and has exacerbated the economic and social conditions in these countries, especially in Greece, where the welfare system has been largely dismantled, wages have plunged and unemployment was at record highs for many consecutive years (Havertz 2014). These sacrifices were claimed to secure neoliberal hegemony in Europe. The austerity measures that were imposed on countries such as Greece during the euro crisis were informed by ordoliberal ideas. The insistence on rules of currency stability and fiscal rules, especially by the German government, agreed upon by the member states of the eurozone, are in accordance with core principles of ordoliberalism (Young 2013, p. 34). The way the crisis was managed already had authoritarian elements in the sense that the measures taken violated some of the European laws in place and thus undermined the rule of law. According to Candeias, Oberndorfer and Steckner (2014, p. 3), this shows that 'even the room for manoeuvres established in European law is now too restricted for the radicalisation of the neoliberal project'. As will be shown below, the AfD wants to radicalise it even further and strengthen its authoritarian elements even more. The implementation of an ordoliberal economic order is conceived as a key instrument in that process.

The AfD does not necessarily want to break up the EU, or Germany to leave the EU, except in case that it cannot reach its goals within the EU (AfD 2016, p. 16). But it wants the EU to be limited to an economic union. It would be a union based on the principle of subsidiarity, with a devolution of decision-making power to the smallest possible administrative unit. They want to organise the EU

according to the very principle of neoliberal governance which ‘operates through isolating and entrepreneurialising responsible units and individuals, through devolving authority and decision-making, and through locally implementing norms of conduct’ (Brown 2016, p. 5). From an ordoliberal perspective, subsidiarity is not only an economic but also a social necessity. In the writings of ordoliberals, the debate of social issues is connected with the critique of modernity and of an uprooted mass which they see as a cause for the rise of totalitarianism in the 1930s (Young 2013, p. 42–3). They advocate the creation of ‘natural communities, families, and neighborhoods’ that are based on civic norms and values of responsibility and self-help with the goal of ‘the organic reconstruction of society’ (Foucault 2004, p. 148). This is where the social-conservatism of German right-wing populists and the economic theory of ordoliberalism converge. The combination of these approaches facilitates the responsabilisation of individuals for their performance as economic actors while ‘binding them to the power and project of the whole’ for which they may potentially be sacrificed (Brown 2016, p. 5). There is a striking similarity in the way neoliberalism transforms individuals into ‘isolated bits of human capital’ that may potentially be discarded for the benefit of the whole (Brown 2016, p. 8) and the way individual states are responsabilised for their crises (and potentially sacrificed) in the framework of the EU. This is more than just an analogy, because the same governmental rationality works in both contexts.

One of the main positions of the AfD is securing national sovereignty. While the economy is expected to function based on ordoliberal principles, the sovereignty of the nation is not to be compromised by the involvement of multilateral institutions or foreign powers in national affairs (Lewandowsky 2016, p. 47–8). This focus on national sovereignty by the AfD is an aspect of *national liberal* ideology. It is a right-wing type of liberalism which has a long history in Germany. National liberalism has roots in the German Empire and in the Weimar Republic. After the Second World War, the liberals of the FDP continued this right-wing liberal tradition. However, with time, right-wing liberal positions were marginalised in the FDP and also in the centre-right Christian-democratic parties (Plehwe 2016, p. 55). National liberalism is in favour of economic liberalism just like neoliberalism. But it distinguishes itself from neoliberalism by including ‘some culturally conservative components’ and by linking its ‘freedom ideology tightly with the concept of national sovereignty’ (Plehwe 2016, p. 55). Because of its staunch nationalism, national liberalism is located far to the right of moderate conservatism. According to Kellershohn (2014), national liberalism is an ideologeme⁸ central to the mind-scape of the young-conservative New Right, a group of right-wing intellectuals that supported the AfD enthusiastically since the foundation of the party in 2013. The goal of the New Right is to renationalise economic policies and weaken European influence on them. Economic policy is supposed to further the interests of the middle class which is seen as the essential pillar of the economy and of the German society as a whole.

The common denominator of national liberalism and ordoliberal economic organisation is inequality. The advocacy of inequality is at the heart of ordoliberalism. In his account of ordoliberalism, Foucault (2004, p. 142) stressed that ‘relative equalisation’ cannot be an objective in a system where the regulation of economic processes by the price mechanism is obtained ‘through a game of differentiations which is characteristic of every mechanism of competition’. The ordoliberal focus on competition appears to be particularly appealing to the right-wing populists of the AfD. Constrained by a framework order, competition becomes the ‘formative power of society’ (Foucault 2004, p. 148). In this system, the social position of an individual is determined by its suitability as human capital. The market – with its predominant principle of competition – functions as a selective authority that assigns the individual her social position based on the utility of her human capital in the economic process. Neoliberal ideology justifies social inequality with reference to the responsibility of the individual for her own well-being. Following this logic, those who find themselves in precarious circumstances, have to take the blame for it, even in situations where the precariousness was objectively not caused or exacerbated by them but by external factors. Rüstow (2001, p. 86), a sociological representative of ordoliberalism, rejected any egalitarian aspirations, because he was convinced that egalitarian policies would inevitably result in an unhealthy mixture of rapture and effeminacy. In a market economy, one would have to accept that there are not only winners but also losers, even

if being on the losing side. The neoliberal principle is blind to all causes that lay beyond the individual. Neoliberalism is based on differences; it produces differences, sometimes reproduces differences. In an ordoliberal system, the conditions of competition and the resulting social differences are carefully and systematically created by its framework order. Foucault (2004, p. 120) described it as ‘a formal game between inequalities’.

Ordoliberalism and Authoritarian Neoliberalism

Why did the AfD develop this specific affinity to ordoliberalism? It appears that it is the combination of neoliberalism with state oversight – the defining feature of ordoliberalism – that makes it so appealing to the right-wing populists in Germany. They see it as an ideal ideological foundation because they want to implement a neoliberal economic agenda and at the same time be able to make use of a strong state.

Laissez-faire economists agree that the state (in the form of government institutions that have the power to intervene in the market) should be reduced to the point of its disappearance. They would see authoritarian forms of governance as incompatible with neoliberal management. But, as Tansel (2017) points out, they are in fact compatible. Their combination is possible through the ‘governmentalisation of the state’, according to Foucault (1991, p. 130), a ‘singularly paradoxical phenomenon’. In ordoliberalism, it involves the ‘reversal of state and market – whereby the state is increasingly governed by the logic of the market’ (Parker 2010, p. 58–9).

Some authors have claimed that neoliberalism has already turned authoritarian, judging by the way the austerity programme was administered by EU institutions during the euro crisis and forced on some of the countries of the European south (Candeias, Oberndorfer, and Steckner, 2014; Oberndorfer 2015). Relying on Poulantzas’ theory of authoritarian statism, Oberndorfer (2015) interprets the global financial crisis of 2008 and the euro crisis that began a year later as symptoms of a crisis of neoliberal hegemony. In its attempt to deal with this crisis, government turned authoritarian when imposing austerity measures on southern countries without regard for existing European laws.

According to Bruff (2012, p. 114), authoritarian neoliberalism is a process of ‘states reconfiguring themselves in increasingly non-democratic ways in response to profound capitalist crisis’. In the case of the euro crisis and the response of EU institutions to it, we can see the beginnings of this reconfiguration process. But with right-wing populists such as the AfD in power and provided with influence on policy not just in Germany but also in Europe, this process would take an authoritarian turn. Something qualitatively distinct would be created that would not look authoritarian on the surface but be authoritarian all the same. The AfD wants to ensure neoliberal hegemony combined with German dominance in Europe and the selective exclusion of certain minorities. Ordoliberalism provides the right-wing populists with the means to systematise and rationalise the mechanisms of exclusion and dominance. In an ordoliberal system, the state obtains authority mainly through preserving the institution of the free market by the establishment of a framework order that reaches deeply into society and organises society around the market. The economisation of civil society serves the rationalisation of the exercise of power, and it is government which ‘defines a discursive field in which exercising power is “rationalised”’ (Lemke 2007). Knowledge plays an important role in this rationalisation process. For ordoliberalism to become effective as a foundation of economic policy, it would have to be deeply ingrained in citizens’ minds. An ordoliberal ‘regime of truth’ would have to be created; and as Foucault (1991, p. 100) pointed out, government would have to take on the task of establishing that regime of truth as the foundation for the constitution of a ‘*savoir* of government’. In his analysis of Foucault’s concept of governmentality, Lemke (2000) found that it is important to see how it ‘functions as a “politics of truth”, producing new forms of knowledge, inventing new notions and concepts that contribute to the “government” of new domains of regulation and intervention’. Eucken was certainly interested in the establishment of a regime of truth when he suggested that ordoliberal ideas should be promoted through educational campaigns

(Ptak 2004, p. 100). He was convinced that his analysis of *economic orders* had resulted in insights that allowed him to prescribe the only form of organisation appropriate for an economy. The framework order was something that he wanted to be implemented without a chance of going back behind it: as a system without an alternative.

For the ordoliberals of the AfD, ensuring the functioning of the market is (ostensibly) given priority over all other issues. But it is noteworthy that the creation of a social differentiation system is more important to them than ensuring free competition and the functioning of the price mechanism in the market. The latter are auxiliary means to achieve the former 'without a wholesale "break" from earlier neoliberal practices' (Bruff 2012, p. 114). In fact, the justification of inequality is where ordoliberalism and right-wing populism converge. It makes ordoliberalism the ideal economic theory for German right-wing populists.

The right-wing populists of the AfD want to bring ordoliberalism into service of authoritarianism. In this context, it is interesting to note that ordoliberals in their early writings often expressed sympathy for authoritarianism. The affinity of ordoliberals to the strong state was grounded in their fear of the masses the rise of which would result in the decline of liberalism. Eucken (1932, p. 312) warned about the 'chaotic powers of the mass'; and Röpcke (1962, p. 124) said that the mass could 'never build but only destroy and that the tyranny of the mass would be the worst of all, because it is its nature not to have the least of a mind to understand individuality'. The mass was seen as something unruly, teeming, emotional, erratic and irrational, which – when in power – would pose a great danger to civilisation. Röpcke predicted that it was about to come to power and become tyrannical. Its tyranny would take on the form of an illiberal democracy, led by those who know how to exploit the worst instincts of the mass (Röpcke 1962, p. 123–4).

On the surface, the worries of early ordoliberals about mass rule seemed to have no specific political direction, neither to the left nor to the right. Except for Müller-Armack (1933), none of them explicitly supported the Nazi regime. Though, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that their sympathies were with a rightist concept of dictatorship. To prevent the mass from taking over, democracy would have to be hedged in through restrictions and safeguards to 'make sure that liberalism will not be devoured by democracy' (Röpcke 1962, p. 124). At the centre of the mass problem, they saw the *weak state* that did not have the authority and, therefore, was not capable to put the mass in their destined place. For ordoliberals, at the root of this problem was parliamentary democracy which was introduced in Germany after the First World War. In their view, it gave parliament too much influence on politics, and thus led to the dissolution of the duality of state and society, and it robbed government of the authority and self-assertion necessary to withstand the claims of parties and associations (Ptak 2000, p. 200).

So, the ordoliberals concluded that the state had to be strengthened. For Rüstow (1959, p. 97), to achieve that, a strong man, a 'Führer', had to be installed at the top of the government. The most suitable position to be turned into that of a strong man was the position of the chancellor. Rüstow indicated that this individual – once in office – could overcome the restrictions which the constitution set to his strong rule by instigating a crisis that would eventually allow him to change the constitution in favour of his rule (Rüstow 1959, p. 100). Rüstow envisioned a 'dictatorship in the boundaries of democracy' (Rüstow 1959, p. 87). In their support for a commissarial dictatorship, ordoliberals agreed with Carl Schmitt's call for an authoritarian state that would replace the 'totally weak state' of the Weimar Republic (Bonefeld 2017, p. 249–50).

For ordoliberals, the rise of the mass was synonymous with the 'proletarianisation' of society, and proletarianisation meant the destruction of Western civilisation. The strong state was supposed to steer society in the opposite direction. 'De-proletarianisation' (Röpcke 1962, p. 113) was to take place that would 'expand the space of economic and social freedom' through the 'diffusion of property' and thus save liberalism from its demise in a pluralistic society. It would transform 'proletarianised social structures into entrepreneurial social structures, and limit(s) itself to that task' (Bonefeld, 2013, p. 781). Rebellious proletarians were to be turned into 'responsible and willing entrepreneurs of labour power' (Bonefeld 2017, p. 250).

In his analysis of the state-centric approach of ordoliberalism, Bonefeld (2012) contended that their support for the strong state went beyond 1945 and could still be found in their writings after the Second World War. In a debate that was published in *New Political Economy*, Berghahn and Young (2013, p. 770) contested this view, claiming that Bonefeld presented the Freiburg School 'without a sense of personal and ideological change', since he concluded their ideas on strong state authority were 'very durable and continued to be so across a divide as great as that of 1945'. While Bonefeld may have overstated the continuities, the evidence that he presented is strong enough to suggest that 1945 did not mean a clear break for the ordoliberals. But for this study, the question is not so much whether there has been a continuity in the ordoliberals' support of the strong state after 1945. The issue that arises with the AfD's embrace of ordoliberalism is its compatibility with authoritarianism in general – whether there is anything inherent in ordoliberalism that makes it suitable as economic policy of an authoritarian project. As this study has shown, there are many indications that ordoliberalism with its potential to de-politicise society and bring the state under the influence of the market is indeed well-suited as an economic theory of the strong state. The fact, that early ordoliberals – and at least to some extent later ones, too – were in favour of a strong state to protect what they thought of as 'liberal democracy' makes this case even stronger.

Competitive Populism

As Bebnowski's (2016, p. 29, 2015, p. 15) analysis of the German party AfD showed, the party is using the neoliberal logic of competition in its attempt to construct a pure people. It applies this principle in the distinction between the 'pure, innocent, always hard-working' German people (Müller 2014, p. 485) and the people of other nations, especially those of the European south. In the right-wing populist mind, the hierarchisation of people occurs analogous to the production of unequal relations between individuals in a neoliberal society. The supposedly objective measure of economic productivity serves to explain the superiority and inferiority of specific groups or nations. A social hierarchy is established based on economic reason. Bebnowski (2016, 2015) coined the term competitive populism⁹ for this phenomenon. The logic of competition in combination with cultural stereotypes can be used to cast certain social groups as less capable and unproductive.

The competitive populism of the AfD has its model in the populist argumentation of Thilo Sarrazin. In his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does away with itself) which sold more than a million copies and caused an intense public debate in Germany, Sarrazin (2010) made claims about the low productivity of certain groups of immigrants, especially of Turkish and Arab immigrants. He connected the differentiation system of economics with the differentiation systems of race and culture, hinting that the quality of the human capital of an individual is determined by the genes or the culture of that individual. Sarrazin, an economist by training and former board member of the Bundesbank, tried to underpin his claims with statistical data that were supposed to provide evidence for the low economic and educational performance of certain groups of immigrants.¹⁰ Sarrazin's approach combined the 'ethnicisation of the social' (Butterwegge 2011, p. 200) with its economicisation. Its subtle racism is very effective: The apparent objectivity of economics functions as a disguising veil for the racist content of Sarrazin's claims. The debate about Sarrazin's book was instrumental in 'paving the way for the entry of right-wing populism into the discursive space' of Germany (Decker 2016, p. 2). The release of this book marked the beginning of the latest wave of right-wing populism in Germany. From the start, economic arguments were used in its attempt to create a social hierarchy.

In the international context of the EU and the discussion of the euro crisis, right-wing populists used competitive populism to explain the differences in the economic performance of Germany and countries of the European south. They combined the logic of neoliberal competition with nationalism and made it a forceful instrument in the attempt to generate a hierarchical relation between superior and inferior countries and peoples. Competitive populism argues with differences in economic capability that are understood as being culturally grounded. It is German 'discipline' and

'ingenuity' (Bebnowski and Förster 2014, pp. 8–9) that make the German economy more productive than economies of southern European countries, where work ethic and the drive for innovation are deemed to be at a lower level. Cultural stereotypes are used to create a hierarchy in which Germany is superior and the economies of the European South are inferior. According to Bebnowski and Förster (Bebnowski and Förster 2014, p. 7), the *responsibilisation* that is an informing factor of neoliberal subjectivity can also be found in these relations among states:

[The fact] that Southern European states in the euro zone suffer from the effects of the euro thus is interpreted as a result of their poorly structured and consequently uncompetitive economy. Hence, the responsibility for the problems along with the solutions is solely in the hands of these countries.

The idea of common debt responsibility is unpopular in Germany – among mainstream politicians and in the media, and among right-wing populists as well. Opponents of common debt responsibility in the eurozone regularly point to the no-bail out clause of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (Article 125) which prohibits holding member countries responsible for the debt amassed by other countries of the eurozone (Berghahn and Young 2013). In their rejection of proposals of euro bonds, which would involve some measure of common debt responsibility, politicians often make use of arguments that are in line with competitive populism, since they reflect stereotypes of the characteristics of certain nations and people – and the differences between them and 'the German people'. The view is widespread that it is primarily Germany who is making payments for crisis mitigation or guarantees such payments. The public debate on this issue is laden with stereotypes about the low work ethic of southern Europeans and their failure to properly manage their economic affairs. Arlt and Storz (2011) analysed reports of the German tabloid *Bild* – the most widely read newspaper of Germany – about the Greek crisis. They found that many of these reports involved characterisations of the Greek people that were not based on facts and instead conveyed negative stereotypes and chauvinist views. Tzogopoulos (2013) found that many stereotypes about Greece were reproduced in reports of German media on the euro crisis. So did Heinrich and Stahl (2017) in their analysis of covers of two German weekly magazines which reported on the crisis. The AfD benefits from this debate and the depiction of people in other countries as incapable or lazy. 'Their misery can easily be presented as the negative counterpart to a supposedly virtuous Germany' (Decker 2016, p. 5).

According to Bebnowski and Förster (2014, p. 13), competitive populism is a specific German phenomenon, a form of populism that could only develop in the hegemonic country of the eurozone. To find out whether this problem is restricted to Germany or if it is a broader phenomenon, one would have to look at the programmes, positions and the rhetoric of right-wing populist parties in other countries. One would have to ask if right-wing populist rhetoric in other countries put minorities and immigrants into an inferior position for economic reasons.¹¹

The realisation of the right-wing populist ideal would result in a society based on social-Darwinist principles with the institutional arena of the market as selection authority. Whether one is seen as a 'productive' element of society, that is whether she is seen as belonging to 'the people' or is sorted out as an 'unproductive' element, depends on whether and how far she is willing to develop her *human capital*. Thus, the subject position of the individual in society is determined by its economic success. Whether one actually has a position or is cast out depends on the utility of the human capital that one presents. In a neoliberal system, developing one's subjectivity according to the demands of the market may provide some protection against downward mobility, but it is no guarantee. Even someone deemed as an achiever can easily be sacrificed for economic growth, the overarching economic goal of the whole (Brown 2016, p. 8).

Competitive populism extends this principle from the national to the international level. Analogous to the potential neoliberal sacrifice of individuals for the 'greater good' of economic growth – Brown (2016, p. 9, 2015, p. 213) calls it 'sacrificial citizenship' – competitive populism accepts the potential sacrifice of an entire people, or at least of large portions of them, if they are perceived as dysfunctional in economic terms, as has been demonstrated by the imposition of the austerity

regime on Greece during the euro crisis. The neoliberal regime expects from the individual to transform herself into a subject that represents a marketable human capital, and 'the people' are expected to form a virtuous community that pursue the common goal of economic growth.

Conclusion

The AfD's embrace of ordoliberalism, the connection of this economic approach with competitive populism and its suitability as an economic theory of an authoritarian neoliberal project demonstrate that it can be very useful for a party that attempts to create a society with an unequal social structure. The regulatory framework of an ordoliberal system with its competitive order is one that carefully produces inequality. It co-opts the individual and forces her to submit herself to and, if necessary, sacrifice herself for the greater purpose of the whole: economic growth. This type of neoliberalism converges with right-wing populism where it attempts to create a social hierarchy: The AfD intends to connect the differentiation system of economics with the differentiation systems of nation, race, religion and culture and, thus, arm themselves with apparently objective arguments to cast certain social, cultural, ethnic or religious groups as superior or inferior.

Ordoliberalism is helpful in establishing a form of authoritarianism that appears as something different on the surface. Its main function is guiding and legitimising the transformation of social relations in a social-Darwinist way. The ordoliberal institutionalisation of competition as one of the main organisational principles of society allows to produce and reproduce social differences and to legitimise them economically.

With the adoption of ordoliberal principles by right-wing populists, the neoliberal order is about to be radicalised in the sense that we will probably see a stricter application of these principles in the future, combined with an even deeper governmentalisation of the state. With right-wing populists in power (for instance, as a minor party in a coalition government), neoliberalism in Germany would take an authoritarian turn, since alternatives to this approach will be ruled out and their suggestion be suppressed as a treasonous attempt to undermine the well-being of 'the people'. With the more rigorous application of ordoliberal principles beyond the boundaries of Germany to the EU, which is already being practised to some extent, this kind of authoritarianism would gain in strength. The state-legitimising function (Foucault) of the economy would take effect in the whole continent – certainly in a more assertive manner than in West Germany after 1945.

The claim of a relationship between ordoliberalism and authoritarianism will be met with resistance, since ordoliberalism has become a model for those who promote it as an alternative to laissez-faire capitalism and refer to post-war Germany as a model for the *third way*. Ordoliberalism certainly influenced the economic and social system of West Germany after the Second World War. During that period, the authoritarian potential of ordoliberalism was not extensively realised in political practice, but it was certainly present. With the emergence of right-wing populism, it has become more pronounced.

Bonefeld, Ptak, Bebnowski and Plehwe with their individual analyses have laid the groundwork for a further investigation of this matter. More research is necessary on the relation between right-wing populism and ordoliberalism and the authoritarian potentials of this economic theory.

Notes

1. For the analysis of left-wing populism see: Laclau 2005; Errejón and Mouffe 2016; De La Torre 2016; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; and March 2017.
2. In March 2017, the AfD got 6.2 per cent of the votes in the elections in Saarland. When the people of North Rhine-Westphalia voted for a new parliament in May 2017, the party made it barely over the 5 per cent-threshold with 5.4 per cent of the votes. In the same month, 5.9 per cent of the voters of Schleswig-Holstein cast their ballot for the AfD (Returning officer of Saarland, http://www.statistikextern.saarland.de/wahl/internet_saar/LT_SL/; returning officer of North Rhine-Westphalia, <https://www.wahlergebnisse.nrw.de/landtagswahlen/2017/aktuell/a000lw1700.shtml>; Statistics Agency North, <https://www.statistik-nord.de/wahlen/wahlen-in-schleswig-holstein/landtagswahlen/informationen-zur-wahl-des-19.-schleswig-holsteinischen-landtags/>).

3. Within the first month after the election, two representatives left the AfD (one of them Frauke Petry, who co-chaired the party since April 2013), reducing the number of elected representatives of the party to 92 (Bundestag, <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2017/kw41-bundeswahlausschuss/527456>).
4. The denial of guilt is what is repeated over and over in the statements and writings of AfD representatives: Björn Höcke, the party chairman of the AfD in the state of Thuringia, called the Holocaust memorial site in the center of Berlin a 'monument of shame' (Meisner and Hofmann, 2017). Hohmann (2003), who once represented the CDU in the Bundestag, debated in one of his speeches whether Jews could be seen as 'people of perpetrators', which resulted in his expulsion from the party. Since September 2017, he is representing the AfD in the Bundestag. Henkel (2012, 156) complained about Angela Merkel's trip to Moscow, where she participated in the official commemoration of the end of the Second World War. Henkel claimed that she was celebrating German defeat. Gauland (2015) expressed his frustration that no military base in Germany is allowed to be named after Erwin Rommel, one of Hitler's favourite generals in the Second World War.
5. Weidel is also a member of the *Hayek Association* (Hayek Gesellschaft), a neoliberal think tank with headquarters in Berlin (Riedel and Pittelkow 2017).
6. Spelled with transliterated umlaut (oe for ö).
7. This statement falls short of grasping the real nature of the clearing system: (1) It exaggerates the risk of a default on these claims. (2) The system clears a considerable amount of money transfers that are not trade-related. Some economist explain the imbalance in the clearing system as a result of capital flight (Bindseil and König 2012; Buiter, Rahbari, and Michels 2011).
8. Ideologeme: an ideological element.
9. Competitive populism as it is explained here should not be confused with competitive populism as it used in India, where it refers to the competition among different populist parties and movements (Jha 2008, p. 17).
10. Critical reviews of his work have shown that Sarrazin's use of data is rather careless and that his conclusions are biased (Foroutan 2010; Herrmann and Wierth 2010).
11. It appears that this has happened in the US with Donald Trump's denigration of immigrants and the disparaging of the economic competition in Mexico and China. There are also indicators that there are elements of competitive populism in Geert Wilders rhetoric concerning Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands. This would be in keeping with Bebnowski and Förster's approach insofar as the US is a hegemonic country in its own right, and Netherlands can be seen as part of the hegemonic bloc of the EU that is led by Germany.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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